

## **The Internet – friend or foe in your business?!**

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We have noticed that many of our clients, whilst relying on the internet and email for conducting their business have concerns about the way in which staff might be using these facilities for their own use

Facebook, My Space, YouTube, Second Life, Instant Messenger, online casinos, keeping in touch with friends, organising your weekend plans – it's a miracle anyone has time to do any work!

Facebook has become the most popular social networking site with over 8 million UK users, and apparently if My Space were a country it would be the 11<sup>th</sup> biggest in the world! The popularity of these kind of sites is evident – but are they impacting on your business?

The Telegraph have reported that 70% of UK businesses bar access to social networking sites as they believe that staff waste time that impacts on productivity. Many other companies warn staff that accessing these sites during working hours will be a disciplinary offence.

But is there another way of looking at this issue? If these kind of sites are here to stay – could we be doing more in our businesses to make greater use of them to enhance our success?

Could you make use of such sites for market research, watching trends, making contacts, business networking, information exchange, promotions and advertising, and if companies such as BMW, Adidas and Sony recognise the value of a presence in the virtual reality world Second Life, perhaps there might be something worth exploring for smaller businesses too?

Whilst we encourage you to take a fresh look at this issue, we're not suggesting you impose absolutely no restrictions on internet use at work so here are few simple guidelines:

1. Ask the experts! Meet with your staff and customers – find out what people want to be able to do with the internet and email at work and how they think they can use them to enhance the business. Now start exploring some of those ideas in more detail.
2. Define what you think are guidelines for acceptable personal usage. Perhaps start by reviewing your current policy about personal phone calls so that your policies are consistent.
3. Share these guidelines with your staff and ask for their feedback. Once you are satisfied that you have considered all aspects of the situation then issue a clear and concise policy to all. This might include:
  - a) The types of sites that staff are not permitted to access – for example online gambling sites
  - b) Security concerns such as use of passwords, restrictions on downloading material from websites, and opening attachments to avoid virus infection or breaches to company networks
  - c) Respect for colleagues – for example in the use of head phones or limiting the volume when material is accompanied by sound

- d) Matters concerning inappropriate material that could be offensive, abusive or be construed as harassment or discrimination of others
  - e) Limitations on the amount of personal usage – for example only during breaks and out of work hours
  - f) Details of how usage is monitored including any processes that may impact on people's privacy or confidentiality
  - g) The consequences of breaching the rules – for example disciplinary action
4. Be consistent in how you implement the policy and how you deal with issues where the policy is not adhered to.

If you want a comprehensive policy on email and internet use at work, or any other aspect of managing the people within your business, then call Emma on 07729 263769 or Sam on 07816 316598, or visit [www.challengemanager.co.uk](http://www.challengemanager.co.uk)